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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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SUBJECT: U.S. DELEGATION REPORT: 30TH SESSION OF THE WORLD HERITAGE
COMMITTEE, VILNIUS, LITHUANIA, JULY 8-16

¶1. Summary: The World Heritage Committee, the 21-nation governing body of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, held its 30th Session in Vilnius, Lithuania, July 8-16, 2006. The Committee added eighteen cultural and natural sites to the prestigious World Heritage List and also decided to remove five sites and add two others sites to its List of World Heritage in Danger. The new sites bring the total number of sites inscribed on the World Heritage List to 830. In addition, the Committee approved the extension of two existing sites.

Highlights of the meeting included:

- The Committee reviewed twenty-nine proposals for the inscription of new sites to the World Heritage List. Of these seven were for natural sites, twenty were cultural sites, and two mixed sites.
- The Committee responded to the question of climate change impacts on World Heritage Sites. In response to petitions received from NGOs requesting the addition of five sites in different regions around the world to the Committee's List of World Heritage in Danger, the Committee did not place the sites on the Danger List but instead adopted the recommendations of its expert working group which focused on helping participating nations develop strategies for adaptation and monitoring of climate change at World Heritage Sites worldwide.
- Of particular interest to the U.S. Delegation, the Committee accepted benchmarks for the eventual removal of Everglades National Park from the Danger List and approved formal statements describing the significance of each of the 20 U.S. World Heritage Sites.
- The Committee adopted a proposal aimed at reaching a better understanding regarding the meaning of Outstanding Universal Value,

the Committee's threshold for judging the global significance of a site.

- The Committee agreed to an extended period of study on the outcomes of the first-cycle of Periodic Reporting and possible adjustments to the process before beginning the next cycle. The Periodic Report, a process in which State Parties report information on the status of their World Heritage sites and their implementation of the Convention, takes place on a 6-year reporting cycle.

- In a departure from its usual practice, the Committee took votes on controversial topics twice. At the request of the US delegation, the second vote was conducted by secret ballot and resulted in the Committee deciding to defer a cultural landscape nomination of a site in Southwestern France. This was the first secret ballot conducted in 30 regular and 7 extraordinary sessions of the Committee.

- A management audit of the World Heritage Centre, the Convention's Secretariat was requested by the US Delegation and unanimously

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agreed to by the Committee.

- The U.S. Delegation was praised by many delegates and observers for the constructive role it played in the decision-making process and for its commitment to strengthen the quality of the World Heritage Program.

End Summary

12. U.S. Delegation

The U.S. delegation included Department of the Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary Paul Hoffman, U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO Louise Oliver, Deputy Director of the National Park Service Don Murphy, National Park Service Acting Chief of International Affairs Stephen Morris, and International Cooperation Specialist Jonathan Putnam.

13. Voting

In a departure from its long-time practice of making decisions by consensus, the Committee twice took votes on controversial issues. Tension was evident early in the meeting as the Committee reviewed State of Conservation reports for the 34 sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The debate grew particularly contentious over the Algerian site of Tipasa which Algeria and several delegations representing developing countries believed should be removed from the Danger List. Other delegations felt that removal of the site was premature since Algeria has not yet satisfied all the corrective measures, or benchmarks, agreed upon when the site was placed on the Danger List. The debate highlighted the need for the Committee to be more specific in the language of its decision in laying out what particular actions it expects State Parties to complete before a site can be removed from the Danger List. After seeking a legal opinion on what constitutes a two-thirds majority vote and a determination that the motion for removal from the Danger List had not gained the required majority, the Committee deferred consideration of the issue for a day to allow tempers to cool. Ultimately, the Committee reached a compromise in which the site was removed from the Danger List with the condition that unless the remaining benchmarks are reached by next February the site will be re-inscribed on the Danger List at the next Committee meeting. (A similar conditional approach was used for the inscription of an Omani site, the Aflaj Irrigation Systems, which was also somewhat controversial. The decision in that case calls on the State Party to submit to the Committee by February 1, 2007 a management plan and confirmation of legal protection for the site.)

The other vote followed a long debate on the French nomination of the cultural landscape of the Causses and the Cevennes, occupying several hundred thousand acres of southwestern France. The Advisory Body recommended referral of the site for a number of reasons, but several Committee members, swayed in part by the site's association with the persecution of French protestants during the 17th century, argued for inscription. The State Party was asked several times whether or not it would accept a referral or deferral allowing it the opportunity to bring back to the Committee a revised nomination in up to 3 years time, but the French Ambassador declined the offer

in no uncertain terms stating his government's interest in having a clear decision from the Committee either inscribing the site or deciding not to inscribe it. The Ambassador also made clear that the French government would not bring the nomination back in the event of a decision to refer or defer it. Whether fairly or not, the response from the State Party was seen by a number of Committee members as a sign of French intransigence and unwillingness to meet the Committee half-way. The inability to reach a consensus on the matter resulted in the second call for a vote, one in which the U.S. delegation requested voting be done by secret ballot. The results of the vote made clear the lack of a two-thirds majority favoring inscription and facilitated the Committee decision to refer the site back to France for additional information. The Committee's decision to reject immediate inscription of the French nomination was seen by some as an unusual turn about to the more common deference extended to the French government, which hosts UNESCO's headquarters in Paris.

14. Climate Change

In 2005, several environmental NGOs submitted a petition to the World Heritage Committee requesting that four World Heritage sites (Australia's Great Barrier Reef, Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal, Belize's Barrier Reef System, and Hucarn National Park in Peru) be included on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to threats from global climate change. At the 29th Committee meeting in Durban in 2005, the Committee responded to this petition by requesting the World Heritage Centre, the Convention's Secretariat, to organize an expert working group on the impacts of climate change on World Heritage, which was held in Paris in March 2006. Immediately prior to the March experts' meeting, another petition was submitted to the Committee requesting that the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park be put on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to climate change impacts there.

The expert working group produced a report on "Predicting and Managing the Effects of Climate Change on World Heritage" and a "Strategy to Assist State Parties to Implement Appropriate Management Responses" which were presented to the Committee. The strategy recommends preventative actions, corrective actions and the knowledge sharing by and between site managers and other stakeholders.

In Vilnius, the draft Committee decision endorsed the recommendations of the expert working group, but did not specifically address the issue of the NGO petitions. The U.S. therefore offered an amendment, approved by the Committee, which stated that decisions to list properties on the Danger List will be made on a "case-by-case basis" and in consultation with State Parties and the Advisory Bodies.

The Committee's discussion on this issue was comparatively low-key. Peru expressed an interest in developing an alternative to the Danger List for dealing with Climate Change impacts (eventually incorporated into the Decision), and Israel wanted some more explicit references to the Kyoto Protocol (ultimately rejected by the Committee).

On Monday, July 10 (before any decision had even been made), the BBC was reporting that the United States was "blocking" efforts to get the Committee to call for reductions in global carbon dioxide emissions. The U.S. delegation made a statement expressing the United States' concern over this erroneous report, and called on all present to be more careful in their communications with the media. The Chair took the floor and strongly supported the U.S. position.

Some other key components of the Committee's Decision on Climate Change include:

- The World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies were requested to develop proposals for the implementation of pilot projects at World Heritage sites that would develop best practices for implementing the Climate Change Strategy;
- The Centre was requested to work with Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to include a chapter on World Heritage in the IPCC assessment reports;

- The Centre was requested to prepare a policy document on Climate Change to be presented to the General Assembly meeting in 2007, to include considerations on legal issues pertaining to the role of the World Heritage Convention vis-à-vis Climate Change; linkages to other conventions and UN and other bodies; and alternatives to the List of World Heritage in Danger to address climate change impacts at World Heritage sites.

15. World Heritage Sites in the U.S.: Everglades

The Committee approved benchmarks regarding the environmental restoration effort ongoing for many years at Everglades National Park which will facilitate the Committee's consideration of removing the park from the List of World Heritage in Danger on which it was placed in 1993. The benchmarks are specific, ecologically based measures that are achievable within the next several years, long before the restoration effort itself will be complete. The Committee's official advisor on natural heritage sites, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), met with Department of the Interior and National Park Service officials at the park in April to develop a consensus proposal on the benchmarks for the Committee's consideration. Adoption of the benchmarks, signals the Committee's confidence in the efforts the U.S. is taking in addressing the problems facing the site.

16. Name Changes and Statements of Significance for U.S. World Heritage Sites

With little debate, the Committee approved a series of "housekeeping" measures pertaining to U.S. and Canadian sites, including minor name changes for several U.S. sites as well as the adoption of a formal statement of significance outlining the specific reasons why the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List. The housekeeping issues were identified in the Periodic Report for North America adopted by the Committee at last year's meeting in Durban. The statements, in a standard format, provide a rationale for how the site meets the specific criteria under which it was listed and, will serve, from now on, as an important reference for site managers and the Committee itself regarding threats facing the site's outstanding universal value.

17. Outstanding Universal Value

The Committee continued its discussion regarding the concept of outstanding universal value and how it has been applied by the Committee over the years. The discussion was a follow-up to a 2005 meeting of experts in Kazan, Russia as well as to the Committee's review and discussions of the Kazan report at its last session in Durban. The discussion was given added relevancy by the Committee's debate on several nominations reviewed earlier in the meeting which highlighted the widely disparate views among its members on what constitutes outstanding universal value.

The Committee's decision on this item requested the World Heritage Centre to compile a compendium of case studies outlining how each of the criteria for inscription had been successfully applied over time as well as a proposal for a training program on this topic for new Committee members. The decision also calls on the Centre to propose a new format for tentative lists of potential future nominations by State Parties to the Convention as well as a meeting of experts to develop criteria for determining adequate protection and management for proposed sites, the format for State of Conservation reports, and, most importantly, standards for establishing and measuring benchmarks for conservation and removal from the Danger List. The latter recommendation grew out of the difficult discussions on the Algerian site proposed for removal from the Danger List (see item 3, above) and others in a similar situation.

18. Working Methods of the Committee

In contrast to prior sessions in 2004 and 2005, at this meeting the Committee did an excellent job, under the guidance of its very capable chair, the Lithuanian Ambassador to UNESCO, Ms. Ina Marciulionyte, of keeping to its agenda and completing all of its business before the close of the meeting. The Chair adopted several improvements that had been recommended in the past as a way of improving time management of the Committee's meetings, including the starting and ending the meetings on schedule, the use of a timer to limit speakers, and keeping to a minimum statements of congratulations and repetitive interventions making the same point.

The Committee discussed the need to have the General Assembly of States Parties play the more substantive role in providing policy guidance to the Committee, a role to which it is assigned by the Convention, but which it hasn't been providing due to the fact that its sessions are now dominated by the elections of members to the Committee which take up the better part of two days. In a bid to improve this situation, the Committee decided to add one full meeting day every two years devoted to issues to be presented to the General Assembly which meets biannually in conjunction with UNESCO's General Conference. It also asked the World Heritage Centre to propose a new more efficient system for elections which would allow the General Assembly time during its meeting to consider substantive issues. The Centre is directed to present its proposal both at next year's Committee session for comment and in final as a proposal to be adopted by the next General Assembly in October 2007.

¶9. Pause in Periodic Reporting

With the presentation and adoption of the European region's Periodic Report at its 30th session, the Committee has now adopted in a staged process similar reports from all regions of the world and fully completed the 6-year worldwide periodic reporting cycle started in 2000 with the Arab States. Amending its decision adopted last year in Durban (at the request of the U.S. and Canada) to take a one-year pause before commencing anew with a 2nd cycle of Periodic Reporting, the Committee agreed to extend the pause to two years to allow greater time to adjust the reporting process and redesign the format for the report. Its decision on this item empowers a small working group made up of Committee members, the Advisory Bodies, and the Secretariat to simplify the periodic reporting questionnaire as well as developing a format for progress reports on periodic reporting with clear objectives, benchmarks and results that facilitate global comparison and evaluation. The U.S. supports simplifying the periodic reporting process.

¶10. Management Audit

During the discussion on performance indicators for World Heritage and as part of a review of the World Heritage Centre's budget, the U.S. Delegation requested that prior to developing a strategic plan for the Centre and a program for 'results-based management' an external management audit of the Centre be conducted. It has been more than 5 years since the last audit was done. The U.S. motion was adopted by the Committee.

¶11. New Chair for Committee's 31st Annual Session

The Committee elected New Zealand as Chair for its next session to be held in Christchurch, New Zealand, June 23-July 1, 2007. Also elected as rapporteur was John Pinkerton of Parks Canada, as well as Benin, Japan, Norway, Cuba, and Morocco as Vice-Chairpersons making up the Committee's Bureau.

¶12. General Observations and Recommendations

Many delegates and observers commented on the marked increase in regional factions which developed at the Vilnius meeting, partly as a result of blatant public political lobbying. Many of the debates on whether or not to remove or place a site on the Danger List, on the inscriptions of new sites, and even on rather minor procedural questions, broke down along the "North-South" divide, with India, Kenya, Benin, and Tunisia the most regular representatives of the "southern" perspective. This, essentially, was that the Committee needs to be more lenient with State Parties, particularly in the developing world, both in procedural matters (like submitting their forms on time) and in much more substantive questions (whether or not a site truly is of Outstanding Universal Value or not). These State Parties worried that many countries with sites on the Danger List saw that as a black mark which hindered conservation efforts, for example, and that the "under-representation" of developing countries on the World Heritage List means that the Committee should be more accommodating to nominations from that part of the world.

Meanwhile, the "northern" perspective, most frequently voiced by Netherlands and Norway, was that the Committee has spent a lot of time developing criteria and guidelines and that these should be followed strictly to avoid undermining the credibility of the Convention and the Committee.

The United States was praised by many (mostly behind the scenes) for the constructive role it played in many of these debates. The calling for a secret ballot during the debate on the Caussess and

the Cevennes nomination, for example, defused an increasingly contentious Committee. The U.S., which has long argued that the Committee should be more focused on the conservation of existing sites rather than the inscription of new ones, also offered an amendment to take a "pause" in the inscription of new sites in 2008.

While the amendment was withdrawn, there appeared to be considerable interest by other State Parties in this idea, at least with possible modifications (e.g. allowing only countries with no existing sites to nominate).

Other recommendations discussed informally by the U.S. Delegation to improve the effectiveness of the Convention and the Committee include:

- The Committee should consider having some of the reports on sites on the Danger List be for "no discussion" if conditions have not changed in the past year
- There should be an "Introduction to World Heritage" for new Committee members
- The Legal Advisor should be in the room at all times
- The rapporteur should have the ability to put amendments on the large screens so that all Committee members can read them (with changes clearly highlighted)

13. Other Business

During the course of the week, the U.S. Delegation met with other delegations on a variety of related topics. For example, the Mexican Delegation initiated discussions on the possibility of a future joint World Heritage nomination focusing on the monarch butterfly migration between Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. The U.S. Delegation agreed to consider this possibility in the context of ongoing cooperative projects with Mexico and Canada. Another brief discussion took place with the New Zealand Delegation who urged the U.S. to participate in efforts to bolster the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the Pacific region, which is under-represented on the World Heritage List and has many new State Parties which are only now beginning efforts to develop tentative lists and inscribe sites.

Peay